Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education
Vol. 22, Issue No. 4, July-2025, ISSN 2230-7540

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29070/fr035b18

Legacies of Colonialism and the Path to Decolonization: Comparative Insights from Patna's Historical Sites and Global Counterparts

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Abstract: This paper This article examines the changing value of monuments that date back to the colonial era in Patna, India, using a comparative lens that also covers the change of heritage in Kenya, Malaysia, and the Caribbean through analogous processes. It analyses the ways in which these once colonial buildings have been reinterpreted in post-independence countries, transitioning from being emblems of imperial power to becoming agents of cultural resilience, public memory, and identity creation. The research takes a critical look at important landmarks in Patna, such as the Patna Collectorate, Golghar, and Gandhi Maidan, and compares them to other monuments in the world, such as the Mau Mau memorials and railway museums in Kenya, the municipal buildings and museums in Malaysia, and the plantation estates and military forts in the Caribbean. The research finds recurrent patterns that are present in all of these places. These patterns include grassroots resistance to erasure, practices of selective remembering, and conflicts between the growth of tourism and the revelation of historical truths. The complicated role that heritage plays in the process of nation-building and post-colonial governance is further highlighted by the fact that there are differences in the reactions of institutions, the levels of community engagement, and the policy frameworks. Using archival research, scholarly literature, and international heritage policy papers, the study underlines the need for methods to monument preservation and reinterpretation that are more inclusive and attentive to the environment in which they are being implemented. For the purpose of fostering transnational understanding, the report suggests the incorporation of heritage education into school curriculum, participatory urban planning models that integrate community perspectives, and the use of heritage in cultural diplomacy. In the end, it makes the case that monuments are not static remnants of the past but rather dynamic platforms that communities use to debate identity, justice, and memory in a world that is decolonising.

Keywords: Post-colonial heritage, collective memory, cultural resilience, monument reinterpretation, decolonization policies

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INTRODUCTION

In many areas of the world, particularly in historically colonised countries of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, the legacy of colonialism continues to impact urban heritage landscapes. This is especially true in the Caribbean. This phenomena is best shown by Patna, a city in eastern India that is rich in historical significance. Under British authority, the city experienced substantial architectural and administrative reorganisation, becoming a focus for colonial bureaucracy and urban planning. This occurred when the city was under British administrative control. Buildings that were constructed during the colonial era, such as the Patna Collectorate and Golghar, were endowed with political, symbolic, and functional significance. At this point in time, these structures are more than just physical ruins; they are locations where history,

identity, and memory are constantly being brought into discussion. Not just as artefacts of the past, but also as dynamic aspects that influence contemporary cultural narratives and identity politics, such monuments require critical re-examination in the context of post-colonial studies (Mukhopadhyay, 2017; Kale, 2018).

When it comes to post-colonial cultures, the preservation of heritage is inextricably linked to issues concerning cultural identity, governance, and public memory. Depending on how they are perceived and kept, monuments from the colonial era might, depending on the circumstances, provoke feelings of pride, pain, resistance, or erasure. In discussions concerning decolonisation, national pride, and regional representation, these institutions frequently become focal focusses of attention. It is difficult for governments and local groups in nations such as India, Kenya, and Trinidad to strike a balance between preserving cultural traditions and reinterpreting them. This is especially true in the context of rising nationalist feelings and increasing sociopolitical pressures. The preservation of architectural heritage is no longer the exclusive function of heritage; rather, it is now seen as a forum for cultural conversation, educational opportunities, and participatory governance (Patel, 2021; Henry, 2022).

Historical structures in Patna that date back to the colonial era, such as the Patna Collectorate, Secretariat, and Golghar, bear unique indications of imperial dominance. Establishing power, regulating administrative control, and symbolising Western modernism were all goals of many of the buildings that were built. Following the attainment of independence, these locations started to be reappraise; some were respected, while others were challenged. Similar dynamics may be seen in countries that were formerly British colonies, such as Kenya, where the Nairobi Railway Museum has become a reimagined site of resistance and commemoration, or in Malaysia, where British municipal buildings are now part of historic circuits. Both of these countries are locations where similar dynamics can be observed. Colonial plantations in the Caribbean have been converted into cultural centres or museums that face the history of slavery and empire. Both of these transformations have taken place (Simmons, 2019; Ramasamy, 2020). These examples reflect a global trend where colonial monuments serve as memoryscapes of power and resistance.

UNESCO, ICOMOS, and INTACH have all claimed that since 2015, there has been a greater focus placed on inclusive heritage policy, local participation, and the decolonisation of public monuments and museums within their respective organisations. Over sixty-five percent of cultural heritage management initiatives in developing countries are now embracing local community viewpoints and regional histories, as stated in the Global Report on Culture and Urban Development published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation in 2016. ICOMOS (2018) pushed for interpretations of heritage sites that are contentious to be interpreted by several voices. The most recent recommendations issued by INTACH in India place an emphasis on the preservation of urban history through community-based planning (Roy, 2019; Dias, 2022). Globally, a shift is evident—from conserving monuments as isolated structures to integrating them within socio-political discourses that address historical injustice, memory, and identity.

The purpose of this research was to perform a comparative investigation of the ways in which post-colonial civilisations, including India (with Patna serving as a case study), Kenya, Malaysia, and a few Caribbean nations, have responded to the continued existence of monuments that date back to the span of colonial rule. Through the process of situating these structures within wider narratives of national identity, memory politics, and cultural resilience, the purpose of this study was to get an understanding of how these

societies have redefined the historical significance, cultural symbolism, and policy stance towards these types of structures.

An approach that included descriptive and comparative research was utilised. The study did not rely on fieldwork or original data collecting; rather, it synthesised a wide variety of materials that were documented. In the public domain, the objective was to provide an interpretation of the ways in which various post-colonial cultures interact with colonial legacy.

Records from archive collections dating back to the time of colonial rule in India, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean were utilised in the study. Post-colonial policy papers from national heritage departments, journal articles from 2015–2022, and publications from organisations such as INTACH, ASI, and UNESCO were all examined in this study.

A thematic synthesis of literature was performed across three key aspects as part of the analysis. These categories were as follows: colonial function against post-colonial reinterpretation; public narratives and community participation; and developments in national policy aimed at harmonising heritage preservation with cultural integration.

COLONIAL MONUMENTS AND POST-COLONIAL REPOSITIONING IN PATNA

In Patna's sociopolitical and cultural milieu, structures that date back to the colonial era, such as the Patna Collectorate, Golghar, and Gandhi Maidan, have served in a variety of capacities over the course of its history. In recent years, the Patna Collectorate, which was built during the Dutch colonial time and later by the British colonial period, has been in the centre of controversy at various points. In spite of the fact that state officials recommended its demolition in order to create room for contemporary infrastructure, heritage conservationists fought for its preservation, highlighting the historical significance of the building as well as its architectural diversity. This tension was a reflection of a larger argument that was taking place in post-colonial cultures about what should be kept and what represents cultural oppression brought about by colonialism. In the end, the decision was made to partially demolish portions of the complex, which resulted in extensive protests, particularly from local heritage activists and international conservation agencies (Kumar, 2018; Mishra, 2020).

Golghar, which was constructed in 1786 by British engineers as a granary, first represented the administrative authority exercised by the colonial government. On the other hand, throughout the period after the country's independence, the structure went through a symbolic shift. At this point in time, it is not just a tourist attraction, but it is also a cultural emblem that represents resiliency, architectural creativity, and public memory. Reframing Golghar as a symbol of local pride rather than colonial supremacy has been made possible via the implementation of cultural initiatives and government promotions (Prasad, 2021; Sinha, 2022).

Significant reinterpretation has also been applied to Gandhi Maidan, which was formerly used as a parade ground by colonial authorities. Following the country's attainment of independence, it evolved into a place where public conversation, political rallies, and mass movements were held. Rather than being known for

its colonial beginnings, the location is today renowned for its significance in the battle for freedom and the democratic expression that occurred after independence. This kind of repurposing of locations demonstrates how colonial monuments may be endowed with new significance over the course of time, and how they can serve as platforms for resiliency and identity reinvention in post-colonial contexts (Chakravarty, 2019; Javed, 2022).

COMPARATIVE CASE: KENYA'S MAU MAU MEMORIALS AND RAILWAY MUSEUMS

Colonial infrastructure in Kenya, such as the railway system and Mau Mau memorials, has become an essential component of the country's efforts to recover historical narratives and cultivate a sense of identity that is post-colonial. Railroads in Kenya were initially built to suit the commercial and administrative needs of the British government. These railroads were a symbol of colonial exploitation and spatial control inside the country. Previously a colonial monument that celebrated imperial engineering, the Nairobi Railway Museum has been reimagined as a place where individuals may engage in educational activities, engage in critical thinking, and reflect on their experiences. Currently, the museum is making an effort to construct a narrative of Kenya's history that is more inclusive by showcasing exhibitions that highlight African labour exploitation, resistance, and post-colonial reform (Otieno, 2017; Gikonyo, 2020).

There has been an upsurge in the number of memorialisation initiatives made over the past ten years for the Mau Mau revolt, which is considered to be one of the most significant anti-colonial uprisings in East Africa. Mau Mau liberation warriors were first disregarded or misrepresented by post-independence authorities; however, they are gradually receiving public recognition through memorials and festivities. It has been decided that memorial plaques, monuments, and exhibitions would be placed at certain locations in Nyeri and Nairobi. Not only are these locations maintained by the state, but they are also supported by community-driven programs that promote the preservation of oral histories and memory that is passed down from generation to generation. This kind of activity exemplifies a change away from apathy and marginalisation and towards active memory and the valuing of the past (Mburu, 2019; Karanja, 2021).

As a result, the public memory in Kenya has been moulded by a combination of official acknowledgement and activity at the grassroots level. Recent administrations have acknowledged the role of resistance movements in national identity, in contrast to prior administrations who were reluctant to address colonial aggression. These transformations bring to light the dynamic process of heritage-making in post-colonial contexts, which is characterised by the intersection of reinterpretation of colonial infrastructure and acknowledgement of indigenous resistance, resulting in the production of new frameworks of historical justice and cultural pride (Njeri, 2022; Mwangi, 2018).

COMPARATIVE CASE: MALAYSIA'S COLONIAL CIVIC BUILDINGS AND MUSEUM REINTERPRETATIONS

In Malaysia, colonial civic architecture, particularly the Sultan Abdul Samad Building in Kuala Lumpur, serves as a powerful example of how former imperial spaces have been rebranded to serve contemporary national purposes. Constructed in the late 19th century to house British administrative offices, this Moorish-style building originally symbolized colonial authority and legal control. In the post-independence

era, however, it has been repurposed to host cultural events and national celebrations, including Merdeka Day parades, transforming its identity into one associated with Malaysian unity and sovereignty (Rahim, 2017; Latif, 2021). This recontextualization illustrates how colonial architecture can be integrated into national narratives without erasing its historical roots.

The reinterpretation of Malaysia's colonial museums is occurring along with this movement in architectural design. A large amount of curatorial reform has been implemented at institutions such as the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur, which had previously placed an emphasis on exhibits of colonial and ethnographic exhibitions. The promotion of indigenous contributions, Islamic heritage, and Malaysia's anti-colonial struggles has been the primary focus of attention. Despite the fact that colonial aspects are still acknowledged, they are recast within the context of a more comprehensive narrative of national struggle and the construction of multicultural identities (Cheong, 2019; Ismail, 2022). These museums now act as vehicles of selective remembrance, carefully balancing between educational representation and identity consolidation.

The strategic use of legacy in Malaysia highlights a more comprehensive post-colonial purpose, which is to turn the infrastructure that was bequeathed from colonial rule into a cultural framework that brings people together. Although legacy campaigns and public history projects headed by the government place an emphasis on diversity, they frequently prioritise dominant narratives that are in line with the ideology of the state themselves. Because of this, there have been discussions regarding whose history are highlighted and whose are left out, particularly in situations that involve many ethnic groups. In spite of this, Malaysia's efforts illustrate how heritage management may at the same time reconcile with colonial pasts and serve current ideals of unity and pride (Yusof, 2020; Thambiah, 2018).

COMPARATIVE CASE: COLONIAL PLANTATIONS AND FORTS IN THE CARIBBEAN (BARBADOS, JAMAICA)

Colonial plantation estates and military forts in the Caribbean, notably in Barbados and Jamaica, have experienced substantial changes from emblems of imperial exploitation to historic monuments that are crucial to cultural memory and tourism economies. This shift has occurred in a number of countries. Former sugar plantations, which were once the epicentres of transatlantic slavery and the amassing of colonial wealth, have been transformed into museums, cultural centres, and national historical monuments. Both the Sunbury Plantation House in Barbados and the Rose Hall Great House in Jamaica are examples of plantation houses that are now open to the public and offer tours, exhibitions, and educational programs that seek to convey the richness as well as the cruelty of plantation conditions (Grant, 2018; Howell, 2020).

On the other hand, the transformation of historical locations into tourist destinations has also resulted in confrontations between memory politics and financial interests. However, critics contend that the narratives frequently prioritise romanticised colonial imagery and tourist appeal above historical accuracy and decolonial truth-telling. This is despite the fact that these estates are presented as major heritage sites. Many instances involve the marginalisation or cursory acknowledgement of the voices and experiences of Africans who were enslaved. This results in the creation of a sanitised narrative of the past that is more concerned with achieving economic aims than with achieving historical justice (Lewis, 2019; Bryan, 2022).

Fort Charles in Jamaica and The Garrison in Barbados are two examples of military forts that have been included into national heritage circuits. However, these forts, like many others, serve as a reflection of the conflict that exists between memorial and commercialisation. Efforts made by local heritage activists and cultural historians have advocated for a more inclusive depiction of these places. They have advocated for exhibitions and programs that centre the resistance, survival, and cultural contributions of indigenous peoples and people who were enslaved (Monroe, 2017; Clarke, 2021). These cases highlight how Caribbean societies continue to negotiate the legacies of colonial violence within frameworks of economic development and national identity.

CROSS-CULTURAL SYNTHESIS: PATTERNS, PARADOXES, AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

Several repeating trends in the manner in which post-colonial nations connect with their imperial pasts are shown by a comparative investigation of colonial historical sites in Patna, Kenya, Malaysia, and the Caribbean. The concept of communal resistance is one of the most important thematic devices. In every region, local communities have been instrumental in challenging official narratives, resisting destruction or erasure, and demanding acknowledgement of histories that were previously marginalised or hidden. This has been the case across the board. Whether it is within the context of Patna's heritage activism against the demolition of the Patna Collectorate, the grassroots memorialisation of the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya, or community-led efforts in Barbados and Jamaica, the involvement of civil society has been essential in reasserting ownership over historical narratives.

The concept of symbolic erasure is another common thread. This refers to the process by which colonial monuments have been either destroyed, ignored, or physically altered in order to divest them of their original significance. There have been several instances in which monuments that were formerly emblematic of colonial power have been remade as symbols of national pride or cultural continuity. On the other hand, this process frequently results in tensions between the preservation of architectural history and the process of addressing the unsettling realities that are linked with it. The erasure or repurposing of colonial structures is not often accompanied by critical engagement, which runs the danger of reducing complicated legacies into cultural identifiers that are more convenient.

An further contradiction that was noticed in each and every case study was selective memory. It is common for governments to reject some narratives that threaten dominant ideologies, despite the fact that they place great emphasis on certain narratives that encourage national unity. For instance, heritage narratives in Malaysia and the Caribbean may praise anti-colonial personalities or cultural variety, but they frequently minimise the contribution of marginalised populations or the harshness of colonial rule. As a consequence, disjointed memory landscapes are produced, which are devoid of inclusiveness and comprehensive historical depiction.

In addition, the question of tourism vs truth-telling surfaced in a significant way. Over the years, colonial historical sites have developed into key tourist attractions in a number of nations. There is a tendency for governments and corporate stakeholders to favour aesthetic restoration and market-friendly narrative, both of which have the potential to water down or commercialise painful histories. It is possible for museums and sites to place a higher priority on the experience of visitors than on critical thinking, which can result in

a depoliticised version of history that is appealing to audiences all over the world but does not really resonate with people in the area.

There are considerable differences in the reactions of institutions between areas, despite the fact that these patterns are common. Patna's conservation efforts are mostly directed from the top down, with little to no public input, but Kenya's efforts are showing an increasing level of engagement between the government and grassroots players. When it comes to heritage planning, Malaysia has prioritised curatorial changes inside national museums, despite the fact that state ideology frequently fit well with heritage planning. Despite the fact that it has a difficult time striking a balance between tourism and authenticity, the Caribbean region is exhibiting a more loud cultural push for decolonial representation.

The existence of these variances highlights the necessity of heritage governance that is both inclusive and sensitive to context. The decision-makers in charge of policymaking need to go beyond the binary choices of preservation vs destruction and instead cultivate interpretive frameworks that permit diverse meanings. An important aspect of decolonial administration is the incorporation of indigenous and marginalised perspectives, the prioritisation of community engagement, and the establishment of places for debate about contested histories. Further improvement of public comprehension may be achieved by the incorporation of heritage education into official curricula and the promotion of critical museology. In the end, heritage policy needs to resolve the contradictions of memory and power by encouraging connection with the past that is truthful, participative, and healing.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, there are a number of interrelated mechanisms that have influenced post-colonial memory, cultural resilience, and identity politics. Golghar, the Patna Collectorate, and Gandhi Maidan are just few of the structures in Patna that have undergone a symbolic makeover. This shift is a reflection of the local efforts that have been made to reclaim colonial sites and incorporate them into regional narratives of pride and resistance. According to a similar pattern, in various regions of the world, old colonial infrastructure and memorial sites were repurposed, altered, or challenged as a part of the larger fight to establish national identity in the decades after independence.

In each and every one of the places that were investigated, the ever-changing character of communal memory emerges as an essential component of legacy discourse. Colonial monuments, which were formerly seen exclusively as emblems of imperial domination, progressively took on new meanings as a result of the reinterpretation of these monuments by communities, governmental institutions, and cultural actors. There was no linear or uniform progression of this evolution; rather, it was moulded by a number of different elements, including political ideology, popular opinion, and economic interests. The expression of cultural resilience was accomplished through the mobilisation of grassroots organisations, the memorialisation of areas that were historically connected with historical tragedy, and the reinterpretation of such locations.

There was also a significant impact from identity politics on the decision-making process about the preservation, modification, or removal of these monuments. historical was frequently defined in a manner that favoured nation-building or tourism by governments and historical bodies, and at times, they

overlooked the voices of marginalised groups and histories that were in contradiction with one another. These developments brought to light the necessity of advocating for a more democratic approach to historical interpretation as well as the significance of acknowledging the many narratives that surround cultural sites.

In order to overcome these obstacles and paradoxes, the research suggested the establishment of integrated policy approaches that link the protection of heritage with the histories of local communities and the cultural sensitivity of those communities. The adoption of comprehensive frameworks that connect monuments to educational institutions, urban planning, and cultural governance is something that policymakers should undertake rather than seeing monuments in isolation. It is important that the cornerstone of such policies be comprised of inclusive consultative procedures, participatory heritage planning, and community participation.

A further recommendation made by the research was that the interpretation of monuments should be incorporated into the curriculum of schools in order to encourage early knowledge and critical thinking about heritage. Giving kids the opportunity to learn about the historical, cultural, and political aspects of local landmarks would result in the development of a generation that is more knowledgeable and involved. Similarly, history should be included into urban planning as a living component of the city, rather of being seen as static constructions that are susceptible to being demolished or bought out for commercial purposes. Monuments should be seen as an essential component of the civic character of areas, and planners should make certain that they are conserved in a manner that is both dignified and accessible.

It is also important for cultural diplomacy to make use of heritage in order to promote mutual understanding between countries that have a history of colonialism in common. Countries have the ability to jointly face the legacies of colonialism and create global solidarity that is anchored in historical reflection if they establish venues for cross-cultural discourse and heritage exchange.

In conclusion, the research provided evidence that monuments, despite their origins in the past, play an important role in the formation of cultural landscapes in the present and the future. A intentional attempt by societies to recover their narratives, express their identities, and create routes towards inclusive remembering and justice was mirrored in their reinterpretation, which represented not just a negotiation with history but also a conscious endeavour.

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